

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDPWATCHERS

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## Editorial

Nest Boxes: In many places in our country, old trees have been hacked down for firewood, with the result that several hole nesting birds have no suitable opportunities for making their nests. Under the circumstances, bamboo nest boxes are greatly welcomed by the birds. The Indian Forester (November 1958) carried a very useful article by Joseph George containing illustrations of the kind of boxes which can be set up. I will be happy to send xeroxed copies to anyone interested. In the introductory paragraph, the author says: 'Birds are attracted to gardens, parks and forest plantations where there is peace and quiet, reasonable safety from their enemies, plenty of food and water, comfortable spots to spend the night, and suitable nesting sites.

Food and nesting sites are by far the most important of these conditions. In well-wooded areas where trees and shrubs grow, food is usually plentiful both for fruit-eating and for insect-eating birds. Such areas also provide nesting sites to those birds that nest in the branches of trees and in bushes. Nesting sites for hole-nesters are, on the other hand, scarce owing to the artificial management of stands - the removal of decaying branches and old trees which are amenable to boring by the birds or contain holes. Where food is abundant, it is possible to attract a much larger number of birds per hectare by the provision of nestboxes than otherwise. Birds that are attracted by nestboxes are on the whole beneficial, destroying many insect and other pests. Any agriculturist or horticulturist who attracts birds by providing nestboxes will, therefore, be amply repaid for his time and trouble. Experiments in several countries have also shown the advantages of fostering birds in forests by installing nestboxes.

More Sanctuaries: In this issue, K.K.Neelakantan writes about the need for protecting a colony of night herons at Kumarakom in Kerala. It might be useful if readers of the Newsletter write to the Chief Minister as well as to the Forest Minister of Kerala, suggesting that this area be protected for the birds.

In England there is a strong movement for protecting even very small areas which are considered to be sites of ornithological interest, and now that the Government of India, through its Wildlife Action Plan, has requested members of the public to speak up for Conservation, I hope that members of our Newsletter will play an active role in this regard.

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A Visit to Bangalore, via the Nile, by Aamir Ali,  
14 ch. Tourelle, 1209 Geneva, Switzerland: One of the things I look forward to on my visits to India is a bird walk with the Editor of the Newsletter. So, in early January 1984, I arrived in Bangalore with binoculars and enthusiasm. In spite of dire news about a worse-than-ever drought, I found his garden looking fine, with two new bore wells hard at work. I suppose the supplies of underground water will also be exhausted on our planet some time and the world will begin its whimpering end, if it hasn't already ended with a bang.

Our usual walk brought us to the local jheel and it was sad to see this reduced to about a twentieth of its normal size; indeed, to hardly more than a puddle. The bird population, likewise, was reduced to a few stragglers looking as desolate as the pond; a few egrets, paddy birds, and a sandpiper or two.

However, on the way we did see something to enthuse about: two Pale harriers, a husband and wife team no doubt, gliding along low over the fields, exhibiting a majestic mastery over wind and air.

On my last two visits I had been lucky and seen a black winged kite each time. Once it was seated on a fence post, the other time it was 'parachuting'. No luck this time, though I looked particularly hard because I thought I had seen one in Upper Egypt a few days before but wasn't sure. I thought that seeing one here might help. The Egyptian bird had been the right colouring and had hovered in the sunlight, but then, instead of parachuting, it had glided down like any ordinary bird. It makes life very difficult when birds don't follow the rules set out in our books. In Bombay, I asked Salim Ali whether this could have been a BWK; he put on his most sceptical and enigmatic look and said nothing.

I had just spent a week or so on the Nile in Upper Egypt where one could combine admiring the magnificent works of Ozymandias, King of Kings - or Rameses II, if you prefer a more prosaic name - (New Kingdom, XIX Dynasty) - with some entrancing bird watching on the river. A comfortable way to do it: lounge on the deck and watch the bird life of the river go gently past. Particularly vivid in my recollections was our stop at Kom Ombo, where the boat was moored next to a reedy islet, so that you could see Herons, purple and grey, bitterns, sandpipers, and moorhens out of your cabin window before setting off to



see the impressive Ptolemaic temple dedicated to Sobek the crocodile.

Some of the temples had hunting scenes carved on the walls making it obvious that there was a wealth of bird life on the Nile in those days - and no Wildlife Protection Acts. I can still see the bas reliefs on the walls of the gigantic temple of Horus and the Hawk at Edfu, 3rd. century B.C., showing a 'fowling' scene: scores of water fowl trapped in a net.

But I digress. To get back to Bangalore. Apart from the Harriers, there were other old friends: a pied bush chat, a purple rumped sunbird, rollers and the faithful black bellied finch lark. On the way back, as darkness was falling, I remarked that it was just at this point that a couple of years ago, we had spotted a spotted owlet. The omniscient owlet must have overheard us because he called just then to send his greetings. However, he chose - still wisely - to remain invisible.

The next day, the Editor, goaded by my remarks about the water birds of Egypt and feeling honour bound to provide comparable excitements, took me to Bhileshwar lake. This entailed 30 or 40 minutes of very rough driving and a walk of about twenty minutes. The first part of this was accompanied by a crowd of village gamins, pointing to our binoculars and crying, photo!photo!

At Bhileshwar, the picture was quite different from the dried up lake of yesterday. The lake was of reasonable size though obviously nowhere near full, and there were lots of birds, almost rivalling XXVI Dynasty standards. Green and common sandpipers, little stints, black winged stilts, greenshanks, egrets, swallows, and no doubt others. At the end of the day, the Editor totted up a list of 32 species. Incidentally, hoopoes and kingfishers also brought echoes of Egypt. Hoopoes we saw on Botanic Island at Aswan, the lovely garden laid out by Kitchener with scores of tropical trees and rich in bird life.

Hallo, am I in Egypt again? I really must stick to Bhilseshwar lake. Though it might not be quite as long as the Nile, we were treated to a sight which would have made Rameses II - or Seti I, for that matter - green with envy and probably forced him to erect another colossus or two.

A flock of little stints, perhaps more than a hundred, suddenly rose and flew in tight formation down



the lake. They wheeled in unison, so that at one moment they were all black, the next pure white. They flew up the lake, wheeled again, treating us once more to that flashing black and white patterns in the evening light. This flying and wheeling went on for about ten minutes, all at high speed and all in perfect formation with no accidents or diversions. Once, at some avian signal, they all settled down on the water but in a few seconds were off again, simultaneously, all on the same wave length. How do they do it? Who gives the signal? Who orders the turns? Who decides when they are to settle down and when they should be off again? What electronic gadgetry guides their actions?

For the last two years, at the summer festival in Geneva, we have been treated to aerobatic displays by the 'Red Devils' of the RAF and the Italian Air Force. A half dozen scarlet jets fly in tight formation, wheeling and climbing and diving with split second timing, so close to each other that their wings seem to touch. Here, we had over a hundred swiftly flying birds, as well drilled and as closely coordinated as any Red Devils.

Having written that, I checked in the Book of Indian Birds. As I might have known, it was all there; Salim Ali had been there first. '....the birds fly off swiftly all together in an orderly compact mass, their white undersides flashing in the sun from time to time as they turn and twist in unison'.

Yes, that's about it.

Well, Rameses II of Abu Simbel, Karnak and Abydos, what can you provide as exciting to the spirit as that?

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A plea for some birds of Kerala by K.K.Neelakantan, 25/825, 'Kumaramangalam'. Thampanoor, Trivandrum 695 001. Kerala: An 'S.O.S.' on behalf of some birds of Kerala: Kerala is (or was) renowned for its wetlands and flowing waters. For its size it has an abundance of rivers, ponds and backwaters although many of the marshes and large portions of the backwaters have been 'reclaimed'. The Arabian sea still sweeps its western bounds from end to end. Yet, paradoxically enough, Kerala was never rich in water-birds. Apart from the pond heron which nests in most parts of the plains during the S.W.Monsoon, the darter which nests in the Periyar Sanctuary and in some other reservoirs, and the



single pair of whitenecked storks which nest every year at Thekkady, the H.Q. of the Periyar sanctuary's staff, no water-birds (egrets, herons, storks etc.) were recorded as nesting in Kerala before 1953 when Salim Ali had to say of the breeding of the other water-birds 'not recorded' (in his Birds of Travancore and Cochin). By 1969 when the book was reissued as the Birds of Kerala, the breeding of some bitterns had been reported. But there were still no definite records of the nesting of any of the herons or egrets. Soon after that the breeding of the little egret was reported, but the number of birds in the colony was not large. Similarly, in 1966, Mr.N.G.Pillai published the first report of the nesting of the night heron, a bird by no means common in the State. In March of that year he had found some 20 pairs of Night herons nesting in a tree in the compound of a temple in Ernakulam. But the proximity of the Gods conferred no protection on the birds; within a year or two the tree was felled, and the night herons fled for ever from the city.

In 1981 and 82 some of my friends told me of small breeding colonies of night herons in various parts of Trivandrum and Kottayam towns. When I visited one of these in the first week of January 1982, I found a small colony which had just raised some 50 or 60 families in nests in a large tamarind tree at a thickly populated place called Manacaud in the city. Within twelve months most of the branches of this tree had been lopped off to prevent the birds from nesting. In Kottayam, too, trees were cut or pollarded to keep nesting night herons, pond herons and little cormorants away. This was unfortunate, but understandable. A crowded colony of fish eating birds has an aroma of its own which even the dedicated bird-watcher may not wish to live with.

Meanwhile I had heard of a really spectacular colony of night herons breeding in a tiny mangrove swamp in what was once a Britisher's private estate, at Kumarakom on the shore of the Vembanad Lake, not far from Kottayam town. By March 1981 when I finally managed to visit the 'Baker Estate' at Kumarakom, it had been acquired by the KTDC (the Kerala Tourism Development Corporation Ltd.) and was being turned into a tourist centre. But the then Managing Director of KTDC had decided to save the heronry hoping to use it as a bait to draw in more Western tourists. Even after hearing (from me) that notwithstanding the 2000 breeding pairs of night herons, it could not be advertised as another Vedanthangal or Ranganthittoo, not



to speak of the Bharatpur Ghana, he was good enough to order that the heronry should be fenced off with barbed wire to discourage the local people from continuing their practice of pilfering the eggs and the fat squabs of the night heron.

However, when I paid a second visit to the Kumarakom heronry on 8.1.84, although the barbed wire fence was intact, I was shocked to find that some of the large mangrove trees close to the fence had been removed in order 'to enable the tourists to see the birds better', to quote one of the guards, and most of the mangroves in the swamp had dwindled in size or died out altogether. A good part of the swamp had been overrun by a sort of reed which seemed to have elbowed the mangroves out. Still, there were many adult and juvenile birds in the reeds and trees to show that the swamp continued to provide nesting sites to a substantial contingent of night herons. More surprising was the fact that a good number of little cormorants and a few pairs of darters had, since 1981, joined the night herons. Some of the cormorants still had young in the nest. I was told by my friend B. Sreekumar of Kottayam, a keen birdwatcher, that the cormorants had shifted to the swamp (now designated a bird sanctuary with, as 'evidence' of its dignified status, a small cage containing a few juvenile night herons, positioned precisely below the board proclaiming that this was a 'sanctuary') because the trees in which they had been nesting in and around Kottayam town had been cut down.

In spite of the inexplicable (perhaps natural) changes in the vegetation, the swamp still remains the only important breeding place of the night heron in Kerala. Now it looks as though this unique sanctuary is going to be sacrificed in the interests of 'development' (which, after all, is essential if the Tourism Development Corporation is to live up to its name!). Plans are afoot to clear a rubber plantation that has been serving as a buffer between the tourist bungalow and the heronry, and to replace the line of healthy mangroves standing on the boundary of the estate on the edge of the backwaters, with tourist cottages etc. This development will most probably drive the birds away from the swamp. And that will mean the disappearance of the only major breeding colony of night herons, which could have continued to flourish without in any way giving offence to its human neighbours.

Still more serious is another scheme of the KTDC which has the whole hearted support of the Minister for Tourism. This is to develop an obscure little island



called Pathiramanal (Munro's Island), not far from Kumarakom, into a major tourist attraction complete with facilities for water sports and all that. Unfortunately the KTDC has pitched upon the area to which 90 percent of the migrant wildfowl now visiting Kerala go to spend the day.

Some 30 years ago our visiting ducks had a number of resorts all over the State where, after the departure of the British, apart from an occasional attempt to bag a few with primitive muzzle-loaders, the ducks suffered little disturbance. But by 1968 when I went to Tellicherry for a 2-year stay, people in most of the well-known duck-hunting spots in the old Malabar district had only hazy memories of the annual slaughter of ducks. No ducks ever came anywhere near their old haunts.

However, one small area of the Vembanad Lake had won renown as a duck resort even before 1900. Ferguson wrote about it in 'Stray Feathers'; Baker and Inglis in 'The Birds of Southern India' (1930) quoted Col. Phythian Adams's account of 'great flocks of teal on the backwaters near Alleppey';, and Salim Ali speaks (in 'The Ornithology of Travancore and Cochin' (1937)) of 'the masses of wildfowl on Vembanad Lake'. It is this well established and most important haunt of wintering wildfowl that is now threatened by the KTDC's plans to bring into being a local version of the Riviera complete with yachting, motor-boat cruises, surf-riding, boat racing etc.

The insidious process of environmental degradation which depletes our bird population is hard to check; but blatant onslaughts on particular strongholds can be prevented provided bird-lovers join together to raise a hue and cry. May be, if we could cause a deluge of letters protesting against these moves to descend at once upon the Chief Minister of Kerala, the Ministers for Tourism and Wildlife, the Chairman and the Managing Director of KTDC, as well as Prime Minister of India, the Central Minister in charge of the Environment, and the newspapers, it may wash away the development projects or at least compel the departments concerned to do some rethinking on these schemes.

Therefore, I appeal to all readers of The Newsletter to write to as many of the above mentioned personages as their patience permits and thus contribute their mite to the cause of bird-preservation.

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Food preferences in some common Indian birds by Ranjit Daniels, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Sirsi-581402:

While reading the note on 'the status of economic ornithology in India' by the editor, in the Bird Watchers Newsletter (Jan-Feb, 1984) I was inspired to write something on the food of some of the Indian birds I have kept as pets since my childhood. I have thus raised at least 20 different species of Indian birds, most of which were either collected as stray or lost or brought home by our friends and neighbours. I should say that not one bird has died due to improper feeding except pond herons which I believe could have. The 'staple-diet' for all these birds 'is' bread soaked in milk. Any bird thrives on this with little or no natural substitutes. However, I have tried all kinds of natural food for the different birds and that has given an idea of their likes and dislikes.

Yellow wattled lapwing: Two small chicks slightly larger than a week old domestic chicken were brought home. They greedily fed on white-ants (which can be collected along with the cells from the mounds). This formed the basic diet for those lapwings and they seemed to enjoy it till the day they flew off. They also fed on earthworms and ants.

Grey partridge: Like the lapwing, this ground-bird enjoyed white-ants. It even ate centipedes and other insects. Bajra grains were taken without any hesitation. It often ate small aquatic plants. Even when thirsty, a drop of water on the floor or a finger would suffice to quench its thirst. This remarkable feature is a clear indication of its adaptation to survive in desertified areas or habitats.

Spotted doves: Very strict grain-feeders. Bajra grains were much preferred. Did not attempt to take insects even when offered.

Grey-fronted green pigeons: Fed more on bread and milk though they consumed fruits like banana. Few or no wild fruits were tried on these birds.

Rose-ringed parakeet: Ate almost any fruit. Quite interested in grapes. Ground-nuts were always taken with delight. Once when I tried to give it a piece of hard-boiled egg white, it took a small bit and refused the second.

Koel: Fed on banana. It always showed a greater desire for grasshoppers and dragonflies.



Spotted owlet: A 3/4 grown bird fed voraciously on frogs, wall-lizards (geckos) and large grasshoppers. It fed only in darkness so I had to darken the room in the evenings before feeding it each time.

Pond heron: Two very young chicks, hardly able to raise their necks, were taken from a nest on a coconut palm after one of the parents was shot down. They fed hastily on fresh-water fish and also non-spiny marine fish. They grew very fast and could even stand on their knees and stretch their necks. But both died the same day after a meal of sardine gills etc.

White-breasted kingfisher: A chick grew very well on aquarium fishes, grasshoppers and dragon flies.

Tree pie: A chick just big enough to fly was brought home since it had fallen out of its nest. It fed on grasshoppers, dragon flies, winged white-ants, beetle grubs, centipedes, a scorpion, mole-crickets, crickets skinks, wall-lizards (geckos) and young garden lizards. Apart from these, it loved eating raw beef. It also used to hoard the excess meat in crevices and eat later - a behaviour I have seen in jungle crow too. Whenever older garden lizards were eaten, the bones were thrown out through the mouth in the form of pellets. It also ate a variety of fruits like mango, jack, banana, and lantana berries. However it never liked to eat green katydids (long-horned grasshoppers).

Another adult bird brought with an injured thigh thrived on grasshoppers and dragonflies till it was strong enough and let out again.

Indian pitta: Twice I have kept Indian pittas. Both were caught hopping about our garden unable to fly. They readily took live earthworms. They survived for a few days only and died. Obviously both were sick birds.

Red-vented bulbuls: The most numerous of all birds we (the family as such) have raised. Feed on grasshoppers and dragonflies. They do take beef but never showed any desire for lizards except very small ones (geckos) on rare occasions. Fruits like banana, lantana berries, and neem are much eaten. They take sputum both from the lips and floor. They even 'suck up' pus from the wounds of our dog. However they do not eat, unless forced to, the grasshoppers of the genus Chrotogonus.

Red-whiskered bulbul: Like the former, fed more on grasshoppers and dragonflies.



Common myna: Grasshoppers and dragonflies. White-ants, earthworms and beetle grubs, Beef - raw or cooked. Plenty of young garden lizards. Several fruits, especially neem. Sputum. Young mynas if never fed with either meat or insects, develop fits and die. Frogs, however, are not as much relished.

Jungle myna: As the former. One young bird before it could fly, set a record by eating eleven small garden lizards in a day.

Hill myna: Lots of fruits pulpy and ripe. Beef raw or cooked. Cooked egg. It likes to drink milk unlike the others. Termites (white-ants) grasshoppers and dragonflies. Small garden lizards. After eating neem berries, the seeds are spat out. A favourite food item is the mealworm breeding abundantly in its cage under the accumulated droppings. When fed on banana alone, the bird develops severe fits.

White-headed babbler: Lots of grasshoppers and dragonflies. Fruits are hardly taken. White-ants and spiders are relished.

Black-headed munia: Chiefly bajra grains or rice. Winged white ants were often taken.

Spotted munia: Like the former, bajra and rice. However it always shows a greater desire for winged white-ants and grasshoppers or even a dragonfly.

Red munia: Like the others, a grain-eater. It also eats white-ants.

White-throated munia: Like the rest. I have not seen it eat white-ants at any time.

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Lammergeir (Gypaetus barbatus) by Rathin Mukherjee, H.A.Z.  
Field Station, Z.S.I., Solan, H.P. and Suyendu Sekhar Saha  
Indian Museum, Z.S.I., Calcutta, W.B.: We reached  
 Sandakphu (C.12,000' a.m.s.l.) from Imane Bhanjan (Dist.  
 Darjeeling, W.B.) in the late evening. The entire region  
 was wrapped with July's usual fog and mist. A local wood  
 cutter came to us with ugly looking small birds next  
 morning. It was a chick of the wood cock, Scolopax  
rusticola. We kept it alive for study in a nylon field  
 cage.



There was a somewhat flat grassy strip of land little up above level, adjacent to our then field camp, the Youth hostel. Suvendu Sekhar suggested to throw all our waste, garbage, particularly and specifically, flesh, intestines, etc of our collected specimens after taxidermy, to attract the black eagles. We had observed a few Ictinaetus malayensis on their wings, in the sky, of that region.

On the fourth day, we noticed a Himalayan bearded vulture on his wings, scanning the region for food. On the seventh day we were confirmed about the daily routine, timing, and probable route of flight of that Lammergeir. It used to reach round about eleven O'clock in the early noon.

After much argument and counter arguments I could anyhow persuaded Suvendu Saha to collect that Gypaetus barbatus at least as exchange specimen for Ceylone Museum. But to our great surprise, consequently it never appeared on the horizon even for two days, making us wait excitedly, rather impatiently, for hours together, fully equipped together with sufficient bait for his attention as well as attraction. But when we packed up everything, the first party already having left the previous evening, and wound up the camp, ready to move, the Lammergeir once again appeared on the horizon, gracefully on his wings on his scheduled flight route. In whatever way it can be explained, fate, destiny, we are sure that somehow or other it smelled the danger.

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Flamingos at Bhigwan by Dr. Sattyasheel N. Naik, Naik Hospital, 78/782, Shukrawar Peth, Opp. Jain Mandir, Pune 411002:

The first flock of flamingoes this year was sighted at Bigwan on 11th March by the members of the Vihang Mitra Mandal. The members of the team were Dr. Sattyasheel Naik, Dr. Ramesh Bidwe, Dr. C.A. Nisnan, Dr. R.M. Hirve, and Mr. Chandrakumar Baldota.

The flock of birds was seen on the opposite bank, opposite to the lift irrigation pumping station. Dr. Sattyasheel Naik requested Mr. Bhanudas Ganpat Dhumal a local fisherman to send his boat for which he readily agreed. It was hence possible for all the members to get close to the birds.



According to Dr. Sattyasheel Naik, there were 207 birds in the flock. The flamingoes were spread out on the opposite bank, some of them busy feeding, some were sitting quiet and others swimming like ducks. The birds were having pink plumage. The flock had birds of various sizes. The height of the adults was 4 feet and that of younger birds was 3 feet. As the boat approached the vicinity the birds became alert and raised their necks high like inverted hockey sticks. They started giving alarm noise like 'knock' 'knock'. We were about 200 feet from the birds and it was possible to take a good number of photographs. As the boat still approached closer, some of the birds especially the bigger ones started flapping their wings. This displayed their dark red colour on the wings with black band at the periphery. One by one the birds started running in the water simultaneously flapping their wings as if they were taking off and in a few seconds the whole flock was airborne. This was the most beautiful sight which one should not miss in his life time to see the birds flying with their long neck and legs stretched out and their open wings coloured with blood red colour and black backs.

As the birds flew, to our surprise on the same bank were three domesille cranes. It was for the first time that these cranes could be approached so close. One of the birds was found limping and when we inquired with our boatman, he said that last week these birds were in great numbers and a few of them were shot down. He also mentioned that the people eat these domesille cranes as they have lot of fat. This poor limping bird could have been the target of the cruel, ruthless hunters.

As this was the first flock, the birds when approached would not fly away for they would fly in a circle and again would come and land nearby only. The birds in this area should be given full protection. Shooting should be totally prohibited and the forest department should put up guards. The Bigwan and its surrounding area of Ujani bank waters should be declared as a Bird sanctuary where these birds are given full protection and bird lovers can come there to see and study the birds; because it is for the first time in Maharashtra that flamingoes have started coming regularly in great numbers. The other birds seen during this trip were Brahmane Ducks, spoon bills, pin-tails, white neck storks, open bill storks, river terns, pied king fisher, marsh harrier, white ibis, black ibis, seagull, wire tailed swallow and a solitary capray.

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Review: 'Travel Diaries of a Naturalist' by Peter Scott-ZF: Richard and Maisie Fitter, on their recent visit, presented us with 'Travel Diaries of a Naturalist' by Peter Scott. It is published by Collins and is priced at 12.95 pounds. Almost all of its 287 pages have sketches, or paintings, or photographs, by Peter Scott, or by his wife Phillipa who is a professional photographer. It is, as far as the craft of book making and editing is concerned, one of the most elegant books I have seen.

Let me, first of all, quote from the author's introduction, to give you an idea of what the book contains: 'Although, I have not been a life-long diarist, I have compiled a number of notebooks which record the animals and the people we meet on our various expeditions. Each is a log-book, a sketch-book, an address book, an engagement book and a scrap-book all rolled into one..... Travel Diaries of a Naturalist consists of extracts from fifteen of the fifty notebooks covering our travels since 1956'.

Unfortunately, there is no reference to his visits to India, and one hopes that India will be included in a second volume. In December 1969, after the IUCN General Assembly in New Delhi, Peter Scott visited Kihim, the sea-side resort near Bombay, about which there have been several reports in our Newsletter. When asked to sign the Visitors Book, he painted the picture of a Redwhiskered Bulbul, and since Peter Scott's paintings fetch anything up to \$ 15,000, we like to think that our Guest Book is now worth a fortune.

In reviewing a book of this quality, it is difficult to pick out anything for special comment. Every page has something special for an ornithologist, a botanist, a herpetologist, a landscapist, an oncologist, and many others. But its real worth consists in scientific facts, presented in such an assimilable form for the ordinary reader.

I was trying to locate a reference to any birds which are of interest to us in India. In the chapter on Zambia and Malawi, (P.230), there are sketches of 4 species of doves, the bottom one of *Streptopelia senegalensis*. The caption referring to its call, reads: 'A quiet, gentle, descending, 'Coarocoo coo coo coo'. This rendering seems to approximate, closely, to the call of our spotted dove, *Streptopelia chinensis*, while in India, *Senegalensis*, our little brown dove, as rendered by



Salim Ali, calls 'Coo-cooroo-roroo-'. It is a fascinating past time to discover the variation in the calls of the same species in different localities. Ioras in Bombay call differently to Ioras in Bangalore - in fact there is variation in the calls of groups of birds geographically separated, though not too far a way from one another.

Peter Scott is not only a painter, a writer, and a naturalist, but someone who, on every opportunity, takes practical steps for the conservation of our fascinating biosphere. On a visit to the Falkland Islands, in January 1979, he noticed that 'the situation of the wildlife on the island was deteriorating due to too many sheep (and cattle) and a great increase in rabbits. There has been a considerable loss of tussock, and visible erosion since last summer. So it seems fairly urgent to establish a unified management programme to stop further degradation.....-So I said to Michael Wright - whom I had met that morning and who is a lawyer - 'How soon could we bring a Foundation of this kind into being?' and, he replied 'We could do it today'. The declaration of intent was drawn up on the same day and signed by six persons, which was a statutory requirement. It said inter alia : The Policy of the Foundation will be to promote awareness of the value of conservation of the heritage of the Falkland Islands - their history, their culture, and their wildlife.....the Foundation will encourage research in ecology, zoology, botany the soil sciences, marine ecosystems and archaeology. It will also monitor the environmental well being of the archipelago.'

This is a book which will stimulate all of us to perform better for conservation.

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### Correspondence

Tailorbird's unusual song by V. Santharam. 68, Santhome High Road, Madras 600028: I am not sure how many of us have heard the unusual song of the little Tailorbird (Orthotomus sutorius) that I was lucky to hear between October and November 1982.

At that time of the year, I had been seeing a family of these lovely and cheerful birds in our garden with two young ones, readily told from their parents by their stubby little tails.



Early one morning, I woke up to the familiar call notes of the tailors, calling from just outside the window on an oleander tree. As I listened, I detected some strange but pleasant warbling notes. Puzzled, I went out and discovered that it was the tailorbird that produced the song. I caught sight of the bird, moving amongst the branches, singing softly. These warbles contained about five notes at a time.

I was able to hear this song from October 22nd till about the middle of November, 1982.

I regret for not having taken more details of this observation and record the song. I hope Prof. K.K. Neelakantan who also was lucky enough to listen to these vocalisations at Trivandrum in last November, would be able to throw more light on this subject.

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Tick Baiting by Taei Mundkur, 124/9 Erandavana, Poona 411004:  
A visit to the Ahmedabad zoo on January 6, 1984, revealed yet another possible example of the cleverness of the common house crow (Corvus splendens).

One enclosure housed a number of fat and squat long haired goats, the exact species I wouldn't know as there was no identification board. A number of crows sat on the ground while a few were perched on the backs of the goats - quite a normal behaviour. But looking closely we saw that these crows weren't just hitching a ride but were carefully placing a ball of fresh goat dropping, that they picked up from the ground into the mass of the mane of the goat. The latter which continued enthusiastically to court the females or duel with the other males. These duels often dislodged the rider only to be quickly replaced by another crow that quickly pulled out the stashed treasure and of all things swallowed it.

If unfortunately the ball fell out of the bill of the crow, a nearby crow made a quick grab for it. The average time period that a ball lay hidden in the tangle of hair seemed to be a minute or so. While this performance continued some crows pecked viciously at the hair on the lower back of some goats, almost as if to remove some. I am certain they weren't de-ticking the goats.

Being hard pressed for time we couldn't watch them for any more time. Perhaps one of the Ahmedabad bird



enthusiasts could spend some time and write in after solving this puzzle. Specifically, were these crows actually able to gain anything out of hiding the goat balls in the mane. And were there any congregations of ticks in the mane.

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The Malabar Trogon (*Harpactes f. malabaricus*) by Ranjit Daniels, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Sirsi 581402:  
 Trogons are one of the most beautiful non-passerine birds. Its a delight to see a pair of birds in thick, quiet evergreen forests. The malabar trogon is a subspecies confined to the hills of the penninsula . It has so far been reported only from the W.Ghats and a small patch along the E.Ghats.

I have seen this bird on two occasions in two different forests of Kumta, N.Kanara. Both the forests were in good shape and can be called 'evergreen'. The first sighting was brief. I saw a male in the company of bronzed drongos and other birds, actively feeding. The male was really brilliant and in a while, the dull female flew across to join him and pulled him along out of sight. I was quite satisfied as I had seen both male and female in one shot and more than all, the bird I had long yearned to see! Not long after that, I saw the bird again though in a different locality. It was even more fascinating this time. In the stillness of that evergreen forest, I heard a soft 'kroo'. The call seemed to me like the low call of a jungle crow and so I set off to investigate. To my joy, I saw a male sitting right above me with an insect in its beak. It constantly uttered that call accompanied by slight raising and fanning of its elegant tail. The presence of a female close by was betrayed by its responsive answer each time. Soon the female, as I had hoped to, flew in and sitting quite close to the male, started displaying the same way. To me they seemed a courting pair as they had been doing that even before I came into the scene. After some time, both flew out twisting and turning between the trees.

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